

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of April 13, 2021

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Jon Ignatowski (Economic Development Director), Mark C. Anarumo (President, Norwich University), Daphne Larkin (Director of Media Relations & Community Affairs, Norwich University), Deborah Zuaro (NRRR), Lydia Petty (NRRR), Bonnie Donahue (NRRR), Susan Barnard (NRRR), Collin O'Neil (NRRR), Kim Caldwell (NRRR), Jason Endres (NRRR), Timothy Swartz (NRRR), Nancy Peck (NRRR), Sally Davidson (NRRR), Scott Kerner (Good Measure Brewing), Jonathan Milne (Premium Properties), Lynn Doney (Recreation Committee), Cassie Morse (Northfield Farmers Market), Kaitlyn Keating (NCDN), Jean Kerner (NCDN), Carolyn Stevens (NCDN), Susan Stillinger, Colin Bright, Jennifer Anthony, Shannon Doney, Bethany Drum, and Frank Hall.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. In keeping with Governor Phil Scott's COVID-19 "stay at home" directive, the meeting was held remotely.

- II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED)

- a. Mark C. Anarumo, President, Norwich University (NU).** President Anarumo noted he recently moved back into the dormitories for a short stay in order to share what the on-campus students are going through. This has resulted in additional media coverage of the NU campus situation and all of it has been positive. President Anarumo said there now are two (2) COVID-19 positive NU individuals, one of whom is on-campus and the other off-campus. There are an additional nine (9) persons in isolation due to possible COVID-19 exposure. Some of these persons had been in the same vehicle as one of the positive cases. President Anarumo was able to obtain COVID-19 vaccines through the Department of Defense and these have been provided to NU students, staff, faculty, etc. There are only about nine hundred (900) students remaining on campus as others were allowed to leave with reimbursement of room and board charges. The NU Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) held a field exercise over the past weekend with twenty-nine (29) midshipmen participating. The exercises included a nine (9) mile hike with a route including Central Street, Wall Street, Water Street, and Dole Hill Road. President Anarumo said all interactions with Northfield community members over the weekend were positive and all went well. Helicopter training also had been planned for last Sunday (04/11/21) but had to be cancelled due to a scheduling conflict. President Anarumo said limited numbers of NU students are allowed to leave campus at one time but their excursions are limited to Washington and Orange counties (and not Burlington). There will be in-person commencement ceremonies held this year with four (4) separate ceremonies held in the Shapiro Fieldhouse and in Kreitzberg Arena over two (2) time slots (9:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m.) on Saturday, May 1, 2021. Each graduate is allowed to invite two (2) guests to attend provided both have been fully vaccinated for COVID-19. The commissioning keynote speech will be provided remotely by Major General Gary W. Keefe, who is a 1986 NU graduate currently serving as The Adjutant General of the Massachusetts National Guard. There also will be an outside commissioning ceremony held at Sabine Field. All resident students are required to leave campus by noon the following day. President Anarumo then asked if there were any questions. Board member Stevens asked if NU students would be required to be COVID-19 vaccinated before returning to campus for the Fall 2021 semester. President Anarumo said that is uncertain at this time as he is working with the administrators of the other Vermont independent colleges in order to develop a common policy on this. Chair Maxwell then thanked President Anarumo for the update.

b. Deborah Zuaro et al., Northfield Ridge + River Routes: NRRR Update.

Ms. Zuaro said NRRR has prepared a slideshow presentation for the Select Board members to demonstrate what NRRR has accomplished in recent months as well as its goals for the coming year. Ms. Zuaro began by noting she is very excited to get started on these projects with this revigorated group, which is denoted as "NRRR 2.0 Membership," of whom several were present tonight. She then went through a list of items that indicate positive change in Northfield over the past five (5) years beginning with Town Meeting 2017 at which local voters supported the effort to purchase a 48.9-acre lot near the summit of Paine Mountain in order to expand the Town Forest. In addition, the past three (3) years have seen successful grant applications that have funded drafting of the NRRR masterplan; the purchase of benches and bike racks; and Common enhancements. The reorganized group has decided on two (2) "primary areas of focus" in 2021: improving Town Forest Access and creating a Connector Path from Northfield Falls to the Common. The former would see improved trail signage, designated parking areas, trail maps, and an expanded trail network that might connect to those of neighboring communities. The Connector Path would achieve a goal specified in the 2020 Town Plan with safer pedestrian/bicycle paths that would unite the higher density areas of the community. This also would provide non-motorized vehicle access to local schools, businesses, and recreational opportunities. Both these efforts will require local outreach efforts and NRRR will keep the Select Board members informed as these proceed. There also will be efforts to obtain federal, state, or private funding and the Select Board members will be kept aware of these efforts as well. With their permission, the NRRR's next step will be to contact property owners along the most likely routes for the Connector Path to determine the likelihood of getting permission for paths that would travel through their lands. In addition, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) is finalizing its study regarding Town Forest Access and this will be shared with the Select Board members when completed. The slideshow concluded with photographs of existing trail signage as well as the aforementioned benches and bike racks purchased with grant funds.

NRRR member Lydia Petty asked if the Select Board members had any questions. Board member Goodrich asked how many landowners would be contacted regarding the proposed Connector Path and how this outreach would be conducted. Ms. Petty said the first step would be to widely publicize this project to see if any property owners in the likely land corridors would be willing to establish contact with NRRR with interest in working together on this. Since the most likely routes for the Connector Path have not yet been determined, it is impossible to know at this time how many landowners might be eventually contacted. Board member Miller is enthusiastic about this project and looks forward to positive interactions between NRRR and private property owners. Board member Stevens also feels this is an important stage of the project and wishes all success. Chair Maxwell said the concept of improved non-vehicular trails connecting Northfield Falls to the downtown area has been floated over the past twenty-five (25) years and he is glad to see a committed group like NRRR now working to see this vision realized. He suggested NRRR members should consider Manager Schulz their primary contact to the municipality. Ms. Petty asked how often should NRRR provide the Select Board members with in-person status reports (like tonight's). Chair Maxwell said that depended on the level of progress made and whether any key decisions needed to be made with Select Board input. In the interim, NRRR should keep Manager Schulz aware of any developments as he could pass that information to the Select Board members in his periodic Manager's Reports. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Zuaro, Ms. Petty, and the other NRRR members for their efforts and the valuable information provided tonight.

IV. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

a. Liquor License Renewals

- 1. Cornerstone Burger.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- 2. Cumberland Farms.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

b. Outside Consumption Permit

- 1. Cornerstone Burger.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the outside consumption permit. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. March 23, 2021 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. Approval of Warrant #19-21.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve Warrant #19-21 in the amount of \$614,833.00. Board member Goodrich asked about the purchase of "Unlit Branch Garland" for a total cost of \$2,150.67. Manager Schulz said the Recreation Committee had explored purchasing additional holiday decorations that could be sited on East Street. Committee members were able to purchase this at a discounted cost and it will be displayed during the next holiday season. Board member Morse noted that of the total warrant amount, almost half (\$282,708.55) represented power purchased for the Northfield Electric Department (NED) for future resale to its customers. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Approval of Biweekly Payroll through March 21, 2021.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve \$100,949.89. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. Approval of Biweekly Payroll through April 4, 2021.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the \$99,860.18. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. Discussion of East Street Parking / Outside Dining.** Manager Schulz noted Economic Development Director Jon Ignatowski had previously (03/09/21) suggested to the Select Board members the economic benefits of allowing the East Street restaurateurs the opportunity for outside dining by closing off some public parking spaces. Mr. Ignatowski said this would be scaled back a bit from last year when eight (8) spaces were used so the restaurants could continue to operate while inside dining was prohibited due to COVID-19 regulations. The plan for this year is to make use of four (4) parking spaces that would be divided between neighboring businesses Good Measure Brewing and Cornerstone Burger. Each restaurant would be responsible for their own seating configurations, safety barriers, etc. Scott Kerner is one of the owners of Good Measure Brewing, which operates out of the building that he partly owns at 17 East Street. He acknowledged that having outside dining last year was a "lifesaver" for his business and even at this reduced level would be very beneficial this year. The smaller footprint is in response to the feedback received last year from neighboring property owners, businesses, and members of the public. Due to the state's efforts to revitalize Vermont businesses post COVID-19, Mr. Kerner said the Department of Liquor Control has agreed to allow Good Measure Brewing and Cornerstone Burger to share the outside seating, which previously would not have been permitted. It is expected that most of the spaces occupied in the afternoon would be used by Good Measure Brewing customers and there would be a gradual shift to Cornerstone Burger clientele as the evening progresses.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to allow Good Measure Brewing and Cornerstone Burger to close off four (4) public parking spaces on East Street in order to provide an area for outside dining. Board member Goodrich has no objection to this proposal so long as vehicular and pedestrian traffic in the area is not impeded. Mr. Kerner said it would not as the safety of his customers, employees, and the public is his top priority. Board members Miller and Stevens expressed their full support. Board member Morse would like to know how the members of the public attending tonight's meeting feel about this. Carolyn Stevens is a member of the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) and she believe many people will support this move as outside dining is one of the highlights of our summer months. Kaitlyn Keating is the NCDN Chair and she also is supportive, feeling that the allocation of four (4) this year is a good compromise with the interests of neighboring businesses. Jonathan Milne is a managing partner in Premium Properties Real Estate, which owns the East Street building that houses a ground-level laundromat and church as well as apartment units on the upper floors. Premium Properties also owns the apartment building known as the Guest House located around the corner on North Main Street. Mr. Milne considers himself very pro-business and he welcomes the decision to reduce the number of parking spaces allocated to outside dining this year. He had agreed to the expanded footprint last year but later came to regret this as many older and/or disabled persons had difficulty accessing the laundromat and church due to the lack of adjacent parking. There also was a tent installed last November that blocked the laundromat and church storefronts from public view. Mr. Milne has no objections to the current proposal but would like to be informed right away if there are any future deviations. Mr. Kerner said he will make every attempt to accommodate the needs of neighboring businesses. Board member Morse said Manager Schulz would be the contact person should anyone have any concerns about the East Street situation. Sally Davidson asked if there would be any cost to the municipality associated with allocating these parking spaces to private businesses. Manager Schulz did not see any. Mr. Kerner confirmed he is not seeking any financial support from the municipality. Board member Goodrich would like a beginning and end date for this proposal. Mr. Kerner suggested a timeframe from May 1, 2021 through November 1, 2021. If there is an early snowfall in late October, the outside seating could be shut down earlier. With no objection, this timeframe was added to the motion as a friendly amendment. **The revised motion was approved 5-0-0.**

- b. **Vermont State Revolving Fund Loan Agreement (South Main Street Stormwater/CSO Project): \$113,283 at 0% Interest.** Manager Schulz said the Select Board members are being asked tonight to approve and authorize him to sign this loan agreement for funds that would be used to partially fund the engineering phase of this project. The interest rate is currently zeroed out but that will change when this loan payment is combined with other larger loans covering the total expense of this project, including the construction phase. The municipality would be expected to pay off this loan within five (5) years and it was noted the engineering phase is now about sixty percent (60%) complete. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve and authorize Manager Schulz to execute the Vermont State Revolving Loan Fund Agreement in the amount of \$113,283 for the South Main Street Stormwater/CSO Project. Board member Goodrich asked if this loan would be repaid out of the Water and Sewer department budgets. Manager Schulz said the Utility Commissions still are discussing the final allocation of expenses for this project. To date, expenses have been split evenly between the Highway Department CIP and Sewer Department CIP budgets but that might change. Board member Morse would like to be sure that sufficient progress has been made on this project that it would become eligible for state and federal COVID-19 recovery stimulus funds when they become available. Manager Schulz confirmed this project is not too far away from becoming "shovel ready." **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. **Turkey Hill Maple Farm Lease Agreement.** Manager Schulz wanted to provide a brief overview of this matter but felt any discussion of the contract itself would need to be held in executive session. He said the municipality has lease agreements with Turkey Hill Maple Farm to allow for tree tapping on two (2) separate parcels. One of these agreements expires this coming June and as there were some public concerns expressed that Turkey Hill Maple Farm might not be following all the agreements' provisions, Manager Schulz hired local forester Rose Beatty to inspect the properties. As indicated in her report, Ms. Beatty found general compliance with the provisions with the exception that some smaller trees (less than 10" in diameter) are being tapped even though this is prohibited in the agreement. However, Ms. Beatty considered this a minor violation that could be easily corrected by notifying the lessee. Manager Schulz felt any further discussion of this should be held later in the meeting in executive session. There was no objection.
- d. **Recreation Committee.** Chair Maxwell said Board members Goodrich and Morse have been meeting with the remaining members of the Recreation Committee on how to proceed as there have been concerns about how recent meetings have been conducted, minutes posted, etc. Board member Morse felt this was the time to dissolve the committee and then start over with a replacement group with a new focus, mission statement, etc. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to dissolve the Northfield Recreation Committee. Board member Morse felt since the Recreation Committee was down to two (2) members, this would be an opportunity to create a new body that would better conform to recreational goals incorporated in the new Town Plan. As Manager Schulz has already taken on the responsibility for scheduling use of the Memorial Park and Northfield Falls Park ballfields, playgrounds, etc., he would like the new group comprised of representatives of the organized sports groups that make use of the facilities. Board member Morse also would like to see the creation of a regional recreation district comprised of Northfield, Roxbury, West Berlin, etc. He felt this regional organization would be in a better position to apply for grant funds to expand recreational facilities, promote the existing outdoors opportunities, etc. Board member Morse feels the current committee should be disbanded before we can explore this regional option. Board member Goodrich would like to recognize the great work of current and former Recreation Committee members in helping maintain the public parks, organize special events, hold fundraisers to purchase new park equipment, etc. Board member Stevens does not support dissolving the current committee until another organization is prepared to replace it. Chair Maxwell also thanked current and former committee members for their past efforts. This has been a vibrant organization for several years but he agrees that this might be a good time for a refocus. Chair Maxwell also felt dissolving the committee without a replacement group in place might be premature. **Motion failed 1-1-3, with Board member Morse voting in favor, Board member Stevens in opposition, and Board members Goodrich, Maxwell, and Miller abstaining.**

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** Manager Schulz has spoken to the project contractor (J. Hutchins, Inc.) and they expect to be back on site within the next couple weeks. General road cleanup and some drainage work will be done first before the final paving phase will start. Manager Schulz expects the whole project to be completed by mid-May 2021.
- b. **Cox Brook Road Repairs.** Manager Schulz said there had been reports of some cracks in the pavement so a paving contractor has been asked to look into this. The cost estimate for this work will be back soon and is expected to be about \$9,000.

- c. **COVID-19 Reimbursement Funds.** Manager Schulz noted the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) continues to hold daily COVID-19 testing locations and the net reimbursement for this from the state is now up to \$38,000. In addition, the municipality will receive about \$39,000 in federal reimbursement funds that will cover extra expenses associated with the pandemic including special purchases (masks, gloves, etc.), building renovations, additional labor expenses, etc.
- d. **Cross Brothers Dam Removal Project.** Manager Schulz said the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources and the Vermont Dam Removal Task Force have been working together on this project for some time. The engineering phase is nearly complete and their representatives have asked to address the Select Board members at the next regular meeting (04/27/21) about moving forward.
- e. **Northfield Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) Sludge.** Manager Schulz said this sludge currently is transported to the Barre City WWTF to be combined with their sludge prior to shipment to a Canadian landfill. As there have been some concerns raised about the (allegedly) excessive odor of Northfield's sludge, he has been working with Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi on the possibility of having the sludge shipped directly to Canada. There might be some startup costs for this.
- f. **FY 2021/2022 Utility Budgets.** Manager Schulz said the Utility Commissions now are working on these budgets and he expects them to approve the Water and Sewer department budgets at their next meeting (05/03/21). These budgets next will be forwarded to the Select Board members so that the water/sewer rates for the next fiscal year can be discussed and approved.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Municipal Pool.** Board member Goodrich saw today that the municipality has begun advertising for lifeguards, etc. for the summer 2021 pool season. She asked if the opening date has been set yet. Manager Schulz said it has not been finalized but it is expected to be the normal time, which would be the third Saturday in June.
- b. **Backroad Conditions.** Board member Stevens said the recent warm weather has really helped with drying out the backroads. He has seen some trouble spots but not too many compared to previous years. The highway crew appear to be doing a good job and, unlike last summer, he hasn't heard any complaints about the gravel put down being too sharp and puncturing tires. Chair Maxwell has heard some complaints about the gravel but mostly calls of support for the road crew.
- c. **Limlaw Chipping & Land Clearing.** Chair Maxwell asked if Limlaw will be coming back to town soon for some roadside clearing projects. Manager Schulz said Highway Foreman Trent Tucker has reached out to them but with the current price of wood chips so low, it would not be profitable for them to clear roadside brush for just the branches, etc. This may change if prices increase in coming months.
- d. **Bone Hill Solar Project.** Chair Maxwell noted that the work has begun on the private solar farm located off Vermont Route 12 just opposite its intersection with Preston Drive.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Lynn Doney: Recreation Committee.** Mr. Doney noted one reason the committee is down to two (2) members (including himself) is that the ones whose terms expired last month weren't contacted beforehand to see if they wanted to be reappointed. Chair Maxwell will take it under advisement whether any committee appointments (or reappointments) will be made in the near future. Mr. Doney also would like to discuss other matters related to the Recreation Committee as soon as possible with Chair Maxwell and Manager Schulz. One thing the committee does each spring is to organize volunteers for a cleanup of the parks so the playing fields and playgrounds are ready for public use when the weather warms up. Mr. Doney doesn't care who is in charge of this so long as the work is being done. Chair Maxwell is willing to set up a meeting at a time convenient for all.

- b. **Lynn Doney: Bear 'n' Dragon Trash Drop.** Mr. Doney feels that the trash drop area located off Wall Street, which used to be operated as Scotty B's, has expanded with all kinds of junk onsite. He doesn't like the idea of a junkyard operating in the heart of the downtown area. If local authorities won't act, Mr. Doney will see if state officials will intervene. Chair Maxwell felt our Zoning Administrator is fully capable of investigating this matter to determine whether any action is needed.
- c. **Lynn Doney: Maypole on the Common.** Mr. Doney is concerned that even though the Recreation Committee took the initiative to resurrect this tradition a few years ago, a recent Front Porch Forum posting gave him the impression the Northfield Farmers Market now wants to take complete control of the event. He asked who authorized this. Chair Maxwell said Mr. Doney should contact the Farmers Market about this. Cassie Morse is the Northfield Farmers Market Manager and she applauds Mr. Doney's interest in taking control of the Maypole event and gladly puts Northfield Farmers Market involvement behind her. Chair Maxwell suggested these groups should meet with Manager Schulz to resolve any concerns.
- d. **Shannon Doney: Public Park Maintenance.** Ms. Doney asked why volunteers like the Recreation Committee members are expected to help maintain the public parks rather than hired staff. Manager Schulz said the municipality does employ someone whose salary is split between the Highway Department and the Grounds/Parks/Facilities Department. This person is responsible for mowing the parks, etc. The Recreation Committee has organized volunteer cleanups of the facilities in the past but, if work remains to be done, it is handled by municipal employees. Mr. Doney feels the municipality should hire a part-time employee whose sole responsibility is to maintain the recreation facilities, clean the parks' bathrooms, empty the trash cans, etc. during the summer months. Chair Maxwell said the possibility of creating a new staff position would need to be discussed at the next budget meetings (as it is not funded in the current budget).

XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Miller, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a contract with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:57 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:20 p.m. No action was taken.

XII. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were revised and approved at the Select Board regular meeting of April 27, 2021.